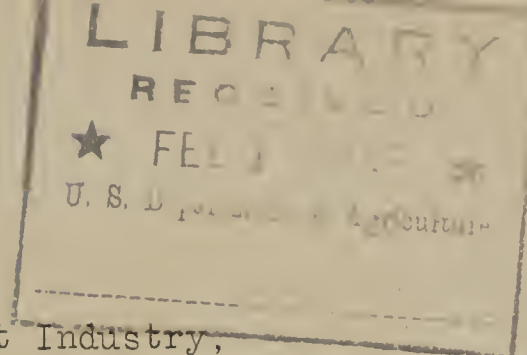


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THE GARDEN CALENDAR

A radio discussion by W. R. Beattie, Bureau of Plant Industry, delivered in the Department of Agriculture period of the National Farm and Home Hour, broadcast by a network of 50 associate NBC radio stations, Thursday, January 31, 1935.

Hello Folks. In my recent garden calendar talks I have been making suggestions about improving our home surroundings, planting trees, building roads and walks and a lot of things that will make our homes more attractive and pleasant. I had intended to talk about lawns today but if many of you are surrounded by cold and the ground blanketed with snow like we are here in Washington you will be content to spend most of the time around the fire and read a good book. Anyway this blanket of snow is just about the finest protection possible for our lawns and our meadows and grain fields and we can afford to wait for three or four weeks before tackling any thing like outdoor planting or lawn improvement.

Perhaps the postman left you a new seed catalog or two this morning and this is your chance to look the catalogs over and see what is new in the offerings of fruits, vegetables and flowers. I like to study the seed catalogs, I like to look at the pictures, then lean back and say "now - why can't I grow 'em like that in my garden." Then I remember that my crops have to run the guantlet of drought, diseases, bugs, to say nothing of the depredations of dogs, cats and my neighbors chickens. But, in spite of all the drawbacks, I'm game and I pick out the most promising new sorts and a liberal selection of the old true and tried kinds and as soon as the weather breaks I'll be out in my garden, digging, fertilizing and planting to my hearts content. One of these days I'll get out the old lard can that contains all of the garden and flower seeds that I had left over from last season and I'll go all through them to see what I can salvage for planting this season. Incidentally, I will spread a few old newspapers on the floor where I sort the seeds to keep the floor clean.

You folks who live down near the Gulf of Mexico and along the border have probably exhausted your supply of left-over seeds before this but it will be some time before any of us snow-shovelers can plant a seed in the open. By the way, I want to sound a word of warning about the use of old or left-over garden and flower seeds. Some kinds like beans, peas and corn will keep perfectly for two or three years, that is if they are kept where the weevils will not get to them. Other seeds like carrot, salsify, parsnip and the like are seldom of any value the second season. Tomato seed will keep three or four years. Onion seed soon loses its ability to grow and make strong plants after one year. Sometimes we don't know just how old the seeds may be when we get them, but, as a rule, when we buy seeds direct from some seed house we get those that were produced the previous season. You folks who order your seeds early before the rush is on will stand a better chance of getting what you want than if you wait until planting time.

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I want to give you a suggestion about those seeds that you have left over from last season, also the seeds that you may have saved from your own garden. You can test them by simply counting out 25 or 50 of each kind and planting them in a box of moist sand in the house, or you can take a piece of old cloth like cotton flannel, fold it together, three or four folds, wet it and spread the seeds between the folds of the cloth. Then you take two old dinner plates, and I think most of us have some old ones nowadays, and lay the folded cloth in one plate and invert the other plate over it to hold the moisture. Keep the plates where the temperature will be about 65 or 70 degrees, just a living room temperature, and moisten the folded cloth each day. The seeds will sprout in 3 to 10 days depending on the kind of seeds, then you can count the sprouted ones and figure out the percentage that will grow. If less than 18 out of the 25 or 36 out of 50 show good strong sprouts you had better throw the seed away and get new seed. I have known cases where onion seed that sprouted 70 to 75 out of a hundred in the tester proved to be so low in vitality and so weak that it would not produce good plants when planted in the garden. It pays to plant vigorous, healthy seed.

This is the last day of January and a lot of us should be making arrangements to start a few early plants. In many cases it pays best to buy the southern-grown tomato, pepper and cabbage plants, but there is a decided advantage in having a hotbed or some means of growing your own plants. You can start by sowing tomato, pepper and lettuce seed in a shallow box or tray in a sunny south window, then later as the plants become large enough to handle you can transplant them to other trays or to a coldframe in a protected place in the garden. One thing you have to look out for when starting early plants either in the house or in a hotbed and that is the disease known as "damping off." This trouble which causes the little seedlings to rot off at the surface of the ground is liable to occur during cloudy weather also where the plants are too thick or watered too heavily. Keep the plants a trifle dry and give them plenty of air especially if you are growing plants in a hotbed. By the way if any of you market gardeners are thinking of building a little sash covered house in which to start early plants just drop me a line and I will be glad to send you a little mimeograph circular on the subject.

I will not have time to turn the pages of the seed catalog with you today but perhaps we can thumb them over next time, and until then so-long.